

Song Moo Kwan Tae Kwon Do:

Beginnings to Today (and its beliefs)

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The history of Korean martial arts has been well documented. Their beginnings during the Three Kingdom era has been presented over and over in past articles. Tae Kyon and Subak are the traditional basis for the development of Korean arts and can be traced back to the Three Kingdoms. Since there has been so much repeated about this era I will not. If you are not clear about this part of Korea's martial art history, you can find it in the Martial Arts Encyclopedia that has just been published.

Korean martial art history that I would like to mention here as a means of letting the reader know the direction of this article will cover is that there has been eight officially recognized original "modern" kwans (schools) existing after World War II. This is where the article begins. The emergence of the eight kwans and, specifically, the origins of Song Moo Kwan.

The debate as to which kwan was the first to open is very popular to discuss. Although there are claims at being the first these can be difficult to verify due to poor communications throughout Korea immediately after World War II. An example of this is the claim that a Chung Do Kwan dojang (gymnasium for teaching Tae Kwon Do) was the first to open in 1945. This may appear to be correct until it is found that Grandmaster Byung Jick Ro had opened a dojang in Kae Sung at a Kwan Duk Gung (archery school) in mid-1944. Unfortunately he had to end classes due to lack of enrollment after three months. This may be overlooked in Korean martial arts history.

The opening of the Kae Sung dojang was done upon Grandmaster Ro's return from university work in Japan. He had learned Tae Kyon and Subak from his neighbors and had been interested in the defensive techniques that were taught at the local temples. This interest in martial arts lead Ro to search out Gichin

Funakoshi, Shotokan founder, during those college years. Ro studied under Funakoshi and earned a black belt before returning to Korea.

His return to Korea was marked by the opening of the Kae Sung dojang. Although this first attempt was limited, he tried again in May 1946 to open in Kae Sung. This attempt was unsuccessful due to the onset of the Korean War. Following the Korean War, a dojang was successfully opened in Seoul during 1953. This has generally been accepted as the emergence of Song Moo Kwan as one of the eight original kwans. It should be noted that other than the first attempt in Kae Sung, which was in an archery school, Song Moo Kwan was taught in their own dojang. The only other kwan to do this was Chung Do Kwan. The rest that appeared were taught within YMCA-type organizations where they would rent space in which to teach class.

On 25 May 1953, the (Grand)masters of the eight kwans attended a conference which concluded with the establishment of the Korean Kung Soo Do Association. This was the first organization developed by the Korean martial arts community. This association did not have a president but had the following positions filled plus one representative from each kwan.

Vice President: Young Joo Cho (Possibly Yudo, Korean for Judo)

Executive Director: Byung Jick Ro (Song Moo Kwan)

Directors: Hwang Kee (Moo Duk Kwan)

Chung Woo Lee (Ji Do Kwan)

Yon Kue Pyang (Chi Do Kwan)

Jong Myung Hyon (Chung Do Kwan)

Nam Suk Lee (Chung Moo Kwan)

In Hwa Kim (Yudo)

(the author apologizes for any incorrectly spelled names - it was not intentional)

The association placed Grandmaster Ro in the chair of the rank promotion committee and as the master instructor. The most important decision made by this association maybe the adoption of the name "Tae Kwon Do", which was presented to them by General Hong Hi Choi, as the formal name for the arts taught by these eight kwans.

In November 1958, Hwang Kee separated from the Kung Soo Do Association and established the Korean Tang Soo Do Association. Grandmaster Kee petitioned the Korean Amateur Sports Association (KASA) to become a member of the organization but was refused due to lack of unity being presented by the original kwans..

The Korean Kung Soo Do Association and the Korean Tang Soo Do Association met in July 1959. This meeting resulted in the creation of the Soo Bahk Do Association. This organization attempted to petition the KASA for membership with the claim that it contained all of the original kwans in one united group but they were refused. This is the same time period in which Hong Hi Choi become president of Oh Do Kwan, which had emerged in 1953 with Jong Myung Hyon as it's leader. Hong Hi Choi and the Soo Bahk Do Association held a conference in September 1959. This lead to the formation of the Korean Tae Kwon Do Association (KTA).

Shortly after the KTA was established Grandmasters Hwang Kee and Yon Kae Pyong left the organization for apparently political reasons and have remained separate ever since. Another problem that had arisen was the loss of several grandmasters, for several reasons including being missing in action after the Korean War. This left their students to fill the vacancies and carry on the traditions. This loss, for whatever reasons, is why Hee Sang Ro says that his father could be considered the "Supreme" grandmaster of Tae Kwon Do because he is the only grandmaster to still be actively involved with Tae Kwon Do.

The KASA accepted the petition for membership of the KTA in June 1962 through help from Hong Hi Choi. Grandmaster Ro became president of the KTA from 1966 to 1967 and also served as the chairman of the rank promotion committee post from 1962 until 1969. Throughout that time and still today he has dedicated his life to the promotion and expansion of Tae Kwon Do.

During the late 1970's, the kwan identification was dropped to leave the art simply known as Tae Kwon Do. The dropping of this identification may have been done, in part, to show unity of the kwans once South Korean president Park proclaimed that Tae Kwon Do was to be the national sport. Today, as more students are searching for the roots and traditions of their schools and instructors, more may go back to including the kwan name in their identity.

Song Moo Kwan expanded to the United States in the 1960's. Grandmaster Ro did not set up specific regions or assign instructors to certain locations which allowed the freedom to establish a dojang wherever an instructor chose. Some of the notable instructors are Master Il Joo Kim in Cleveland, Ohio; Master Moo Myung Yun in Willmar, Minnesota; Master Byung Yul Lee in Maple Grove, Minnesota; Master Joon Pyo Choi in Columbus, Ohio; Master Yong Kyu Yu in Houston, Texas; and Masters Chang Jin Kang, Jin Il Chang, Tae Ryang Chang in California, New York and New Jersey respectively. Another instructor who deserves mention is, the now retired, Master Jay Hyon. Master Hyon moved into the Minneapolis, Minnesota area and opened the Karate Center dojang. He played a large part in

bringing Tae Kwon Do into Minnesota. He also played a role in bringing Grandmaster Ro to the United States. Master Hyon retired in 1980 and turned his teaching responsibilities over to Master Hee Sang Ro, who had come over from Korea four years earlier. Master Ro continues to develop Tae Kwon Do and carry on the traditions of Song Moo Kwan through his North American Tae Kwon Do Federation (NATF). He has also been working on the development of a more organized Song Moo Kwan community which would include a central promotion committee.

Currently you can find Song Moo Kwan instructors as members of a multitude of Tae Kwon Do Associations and Federations. This comes partly from Grandmaster Ro's belief in personal development taking a greater role than the politics of rank. In fact you will find that a variety of poomse are taught within the Song Moo Kwan community including Pinan, Chang Hon, Tae Guek and Chung Bong. The Chung Bong poomse are unique to Song Moo Kwan since they were developed by Master Hyon and were first performed in 1974. These poomse were designed to be realistic yet allow for some of the flashy kicking techniques that can be found in Tae Kwon Do. The seven poomse in this set were developed so the majority of the combinations within them can be quickly and easily adapted to fit within combat situations. They also include the symmetry that will develop the student equally. Lastly, jumping and spinning kicks can be found as well as stances that fit combat/tournament situations and a variety of hand techniques. There are no official poomse for Song Moo Kwan. Although poomse plays an important role in the development of a Tae Kwon Do student, the decision of which set to study is less consequential. All poomse are intended to build the student's stamina, endurance and technique so which patterns are learned do not have a significant affect on the student's abilities.

The development of Song Moo Kwan has happened at an outstanding rate. From the limited travel the author has been able to do, there are large Song Moo Kwan organizations. The NATF has about twenty-five schools listed and the Northern Tae Kwon Do Association, headed by Tom Sullivan who was one of Master Hyon's students, has schools numbering in the sixties. The success of these groups is most likely similar to those throughout the country.

The years of Tae Kwon Do growth in the United States has helped the art as a whole grow successfully. Unfortunately along with this growth there have been many political battles which have hurt the students. The continued growth of Tae Kwon Do needs to have the masters and instructors go back to review the five tenets of Tae Kwon Do. Many instructors teach these concepts of integrity, courtesy, perseverance, self-control, and indomitable spirit but do not always walk their talk when dealing with other instructors or organizations. Instructors who can

maintain these tenets can teach the more important aspects of life instead of showing their students ideas like greed and self-importance. When the international organizations return to practicing the tenets outside the dojang as well as inside, then we may be able to develop the kind of community and society that we are preaching. This would also lead to smaller victories like keeping Tae Kwon Do part of the Olympics. I would like to close with a "Thank you" to master Hee Sang Ro for his assistance and translation of his father's notes.

Song Moo Kwan Lineage

(as known to the author)

		Hee Sang Ro Minneapolis, MN	Joel Coles Otsego, MN		
			Kathy Coles Otsego, MN		
			Fred Baker Mound, MN		
			Kathy Hartley Minneapolis, MN		
		Jay Hyon Minneapolis, MN (retired)	Tom Sullivan Duluth, MN	Robert Frankovich Minneapolis, MN (1)	Nels Erickson Duluth, MN
			Vic Marotta St. Louis Park, MN		Mike Moebeck Savage, MN

			Bill Miller Coon Rapids, MN		Glenn Elo Brooklyn Park, MN
			Joe Sabas Crystal, MN		Greg Mullenbach Waseca, MN
			Tim Mullin Bloomington, MN		Judd Granger Golden Valley, MN
			John Haaland Roseville, MN		Eliot Kohan St. Paul, MN
		Byung Hoon Park Australia	Kirk Koskella Emmett, ID		Emily Herron St. Paul, MN
					Mike Horvath Minneapolis, MN
					Tom Ferry St. Paul, MN
		Il Joo Kim Cleveland, OH	Bob Chaney	Gary Mattevi Duluth, MN	
		Moo Myung			

		Yun Wilmar, MN			
Tae Kyon and Subak		Byung Yul Lee Maple Grove, MN	Kevin Kastelle Maple Grove, MN		
	Byung Jick Ro	Joon Pyo Choi Columbus, OH			
Shotokan Karate		Yong Kyu Yu Houston, TX			
		Chang Jin Kang California			
		Jin Il Chang New York			
		Tae Ryang Chang New Jersey			
		Richard Johnson San Jose, Ca	Yakov Zbinovitch		